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Passive smoking not a great cancer risk, scientists claim

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A controversial report from a team of top scientists has found that passive smoking does not pose a significant cancer risk.

The finding, based on an analysis of 48 studies published worldwide, flies in the face of the widely-held view that inhaling other people's tobacco smoke is dangerous.

The research was carried out by a working group of respected European experts on molecular biology, genetics and statistics.

They concluded that previous thinking about the hazards of environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) based on experiments with laboratory rats was misplaced.

Earlier studies had also been prone to distortion due to statistical bias, it was claimed.

However, anti-smoking campaigners are quick to point out that the study was sponsored by three major tobacco companies, Philip Morris Europe, British-American Tobacco and Rothmans International. They also claim that it ignores harmful effects other than cancer, like bronchitis.

The scientists insist they maintained a strictly neutral stance throughout. Prof Jeffrey Idle, who chaired the working group, said he only agreed to set up the research on the strict understanding that even if the results were unfavourable to tobacco interests they would be published in full.

In 1992 the US Environmental Protection Agency classified ETS as a class-A carcinogen, setting the benchmark for attitudes towards passive smoking today.

But according to the new study the evidence on which this conclusion was based was flawed. More recent research had shown that just because rats exposed to high doses of a cancer causing chemical developed tumours this did not mean lower levels of the same substance would present a reduced risk to humans.

Source: https://www.industrydocuments.ucsf.edu/docs/jzgj0001